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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Mideast
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Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz cited the IDF's expectation that the PA will act soon to replace the senior echelon in the PA's security services in the West Bank. The newspaper quoted a senior Israeli military source as saying that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas is not making personnel changes in the leadership of the West Bank security services demonstrates a lack of seriousness in the PA's part in fighting terrorist networks in the region. The source was quoted as saying that Abbas has ousted many of the top brass in the security services in the Gaza Strip, bringing about a real improvement in the security situation. Maariv led with "real" arrests of Islamic Jihad activists by the PA in recent days, following Friday's suicide bombing in Tel Aviv.

All media stressed the uncovering of Qassam rockets near Jenin on Wednesday. Yediot bannered: "Qassam Near Afula." Israel Radio reported that a booby-trapped car exploded next to IDF troops in Nablus last night. There were no casualties.

Israel Radio reported that the Likud Central Committee is expected to vote massively in favor of the compromise formula shaped by Minister-Without-Portfolio and committee chairman Tzachi Hanegbi, which requires a national referendum on disengagement.

Leading media quoted Disengagement Administration head Yonatan Bassi as saying Wednesday that 66 (or 63, depending on the sources) settler families from the Gaza Strip have already concluded a compensation and evacuation agreement with his administration, although hundreds more families are now negotiating. Leading media (main story in Jerusalem Post) reported that Vice Premier Shimon Peres and PA Civilian Affairs Minister Muhammad Dahlan met Wednesday and discussed the possible transfer of the Katif Bloc's hothouses to the Palestinians. Israel Radio also quoted Dahlan as saying that he has devised a security agreement with Israel, which must be implemented, and that Israel is not respecting the commitments made at his meeting with Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz regarding the lifting of roadblocks.

Over the past few days, the media discussed a remark made by Police Insp. Gen. Moshe Karadi at Sunday's cabinet meeting, according to which a Jewish religious ruling has been issued, allowing shooting at Druze and Bedouin IDF soldiers participating in the disengagement move. Last night, Channel 2-TV reported on a ruling by a Bedouin religious man that people attempting to kill Bedouin soldiers should be shot at.

Ha'aretz reported that Palestinian and Israeli officials who attended a meeting called by the UN Environmental Program (UNEP) in Helsinki decided that the joint environmental committee, which ceased at the beginning of the Intifada, will resume its work in the area in two months.

Leading media reported that President Bush on Wednesday reiterated his demand that Syria withdraw from Lebanon. He said that the world "is speaking with one voice when

it comes to making sure that democracy has a chance to flourish in Lebanon." Jerusalem Post quoted Hizbullah officials as saying in interviews with the newspaper that Israel should have no illusions that the rise of the opposition tide in Lebanon, and even the possible departure of Syrian troops from that country, will smooth a path to warmer relations between Jerusalem and Beirut.

Israel Radio reported that Abbas is slated to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Saudi FM Saud al-Faysal in Sharm-el-Sheikh today.

Jerusalem Post reported that a delegation of some 15-20 Israelis of Libyan origin will visit Libya within the next couple of weeks. This is the first time Israelis will travel to that country.

Ha'aretz reported that the U.S. is toughening its stance on Iran's nuclear program, following the publication of a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that states that Iran continues to violate its commitments and refuses to admit inspectors at sites where nuclear weapons are possibly being developed.

Jerusalem Post reported that Yitschak Ben-Gad, Israel's new Consul-General in Miami, has recently published a book entitled "The Road Map to Hell." The newspaper quoted Ben-Gad as saying that the publisher changed the book's name from "Jihad: License to Kill" against Ben-Gad's wishes, and that he does not believe that the book would harm his relations with Florida Governor Jeb Bush.

A Dialog poll supervised by Prof. Camille Fuchs and conducted for Ha'aretz found that the Israeli public is confident that PM Sharon initiated the disengagement for the good of Israel, rather than because of the criminal investigations against him, but at the same time, a large majority believes that Sharon is corrupt.

- 48.6 percent: Sharon initiated the disengagement for reasons based on the good of Israel.
- 62 percent: Sharon is corrupt.
- 19 percent: Sharon has undergone a real ideological transformation with respect to the occupation.
- 12.2 percent: The reason for the disengagement initiative was Sharon's political troubles.
- 12.4 percent: The probes of Sharon and his sons are the real reason for the disengagement.

[1](#)1. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "One can only hope that Israel will put pressure on the Palestinians when it comes to matters of security, but will refrain at the same time from settlement activity that would further undermine the territorial contiguity of the Palestinian state to be."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "Blair is the person who is urging the President of the U.S. to be forthcoming with the Palestinians and to act assiduously for the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz: "Indeed, and this is a message for Israel, the rulers of the region are now internalizing the fact that Bush is determined to make his declarations come true, which is something that cannot be said of them and their Israeli counterparts."

Block Quotes:

[1](#)I. "A Question of Balance"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 3): "The London Meeting on Tuesday dealt primarily with helping the Palestinians move toward establishing an independent and democratic state. But one cannot ignore the determined commitment to implementing the road map that was expressed by all those who attended.... The reactions in Jerusalem to the London Meeting conclusions and the statements by Condoleezza Rice on the expectations for progress along the road map track following the disengagement were mixed. On the one hand, justified concern was expressed with regard to the fact that the London Meeting failed to place sufficient emphasis on the Palestinians' fight

against terror. On the other hand, both Sharon and his deputy, Ehud Olmert, reiterated Israel's commitment to the road map. Minister Olmert justifiably said that the London Meeting declarations could not be set apart from the events in the field -- namely, the terror attacks. One can only hope that Israel will put pressure on the Palestinians when it comes to matters of security, but will refrain at the same time from settlement activity that would further undermine the territorial contiguity of the Palestinian state to be."

II. "Blair, the Palestinians' Friend"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (March 3): "British Prime Minister Tony Blair is an enthusiastic supporter of the Palestinians. Moreover, in order to repel the criticism aired against him from within his own party ranks about his too cozy relationship with U.S. President George Bush, he wants to pay a heavy price, at Israel's expense. Not only that, Blair is the person who is urging the President of the U.S. to be forthcoming with the Palestinians and to act assiduously for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Abu Mazen emerged from the London conference with many assets in hand. He was 'painted' a rosy hue for the consumption of British and European public opinion, and he also received far-reaching promises to rehabilitate the Palestinian Authority. Abu Mazen, in practice, has not been obliged to do anything tangible and thorough against the terror organizations. For Tony Blair and his comrades, it is enough that Abu Mazen air statements in condemnation of terrorism and make promises that he will do everything in his power to combat terrorism."

III. "The Dreamer"

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in Ha'aretz (March 3): "Indeed, and this is a message for Israel, the rulers of the region are now internalizing the fact that Bush is determined to make his declarations come true, which is something that cannot be said of them and their Israeli counterparts.... Democracies, [Bush has] said, do not fight each other and do not provide a haven for terrorism.... And why, one must ask, doesn't the government of Israel ... adopt this doctrine and present it as an ultimatum to the Palestinians? After all, specifically now when Bush has transformed it into his strategic vision for the Middle East, and the London Conference is also pushing in that direction, the Palestinians will not be able to dismiss it easily. And this is also indeed a way, apart from a more credible agreement, of also gaining more courageous presidential support for Israel."

12. Lebanon:

Summary:

Veteran journalist Yaron London wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The developments in Lebanon conceal threats that are larger than the hopes."

Diplomatic correspondent Dov Kontorer wrote in conservative Russian-language daily Vesty: "The mass demonstrations by the Lebanese opposition make Lebanon one of the most interesting arenas of current world politics."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Let Us Be Wary of Our Hopes"

Veteran journalist Yaron London wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 3): "The transformations in Lebanon are giving Israelis rare hours of satisfaction.... [It looks as if] through the mediation of the global broadcasting networks, the democratic zeal in Lebanon already influences other Arab societies, and as if it is already possible to witness President Mubarak somewhat loosening the grip of his dictatorship -- and some Syrian intellectuals encouraging their president to leave Lebanon. Israelis often recall that democratic states have never fought against each other. Thus, we conclude that democratization of the Arab world will create a New Middle East at peace with Israel. One had better cast doubts about all those assumptions. The power of Syria's fans in Lebanon has not yet become clear; neither has it become obvious whether the cohesion of the [Lebanese] opposition is a

stable political phenomenon. Had Israel been in control of the agenda, it should have demanded that the Shi'ite militia [Hizbullah] be disarmed even before the Syrians complete their withdrawal. But the Americans are pressed for time. Let us conclude by saying that the developments in Lebanon conceal threats that are larger than the hopes."

II. "A Cautious Glance at the Independence Extravaganza in Lebanon"

Diplomatic correspondent Dov Kontorer wrote in conservative Russian-language daily Vesty (March 3): "The latest events in Lebanon are a unique example of mass political protest of the citizens in the Arab world.... The mass demonstrations by the Lebanese opposition make Lebanon one of the most interesting arenas of current world politics ... and are actually primarily connected to Bashar Assad's constraints and inability to use military power without the danger of a [subsequent] smashing American attack.... Bashar Assad is ... passively observing the Lebanese developments, which are very unfavorable for Syria, and doesn't find a possibility of interfering. ... If something endangers the Lebanese protest movement, it is not Syrian intervention, but the danger of an internal split and a ... military confrontation among the different religious communities ... The possibility of the escalation of those internal contradictions will be unavoidably increase towards the Parliamentary elections scheduled for the second part of May 2005. Israel is staying away from the events in Lebanon for several reasons: first of all, [Israel's] public activity would be counterproductive; secondly, because of a natural fear that the democratic processes in the Arab countries would go in the direction of radicalization and Islamism.... At the same time involving Israel in the Lebanese events is actually one of the Syrian interests."

13. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "[Severe] forecasts [about the Iranian nuclear program] are intolerable.... The U.S. must urgently understand that this is a classical case of the necessity of prevention."

Block Quotes:

"Time Is of the Essence"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 3): "The news that emanated from President Bush's entourage during this trip to Europe is not encouraging. According to The Washington Post, the U.S. Administration has for the time being abandoned its militant approach vis-a-vis Iran's nuclearization, and it prefers instead to offer the Iranians a gift, if they cease their efforts to develop nuclear weapons, Bush himself has said: 'Iran is not Iraq,' and 'Democracy is just beginning'.... [Severe] forecasts [about the Iranian nuclear program] are intolerable. If the foot-dragging and the light treatment continue, those predictions could result in an irremediable strategic threat that would thoroughly change the balances of power and nuclearization in the entire world. The U.S. must urgently understand that this is a classical case of the necessity of prevention."

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